

Learning to express yourself can be a dose of good medicine

By Craig Miller

What happens to the feelings that are generated within us during difficult or uncomfortable situations? If we don't let the feelings out with each emotional event, those feelings accumulate over time and become trapped inside. Cramming feelings into the unconscious mind is called "repression."

The repressed feelings can show up through various symptoms like the "pressure cooker effect." For example, the more pressure that is created the more likely the body will react like a boiling pot of water – letting feelings accumulate until some little incident cracks the lid and blows off – yelling, anger, tempers, slamming doors, driving too fast, frequent defensiveness or walking away. In cases of accumulation of emotion from prolonged stressful situations, some people react like a pot of boiling water with a lid that shakes – becoming anxious, nervous with interrupted sleep, poor concentration, crying spells and depression. Although the symptoms may come and go depending on our ability to tolerate circumstances, these symptoms can be a way of our body telling us it cannot hold any more feelings inside.

After holding in emotions over a long period of time, repressed feelings can come out through physical conditions. Research has shown that eighty to ninety percent of our physical conditions (such as medical ailments) have some emotional root from your life. That is an amazing finding that cannot be ignored. Dr. John Sarno, MD in his book, *The Mindbody Prescription*, states that when emotions are held inside, the mind produces physical symptoms to keep our attention focused on the body to avoid emotions that may be unbearable to feel.

Emotions are given as a natural function to release energy and communicate what we think and feel. I knew a man named Jerry who had situations at work which caused frustration and anger, but he rarely expressed his thoughts or feelings. At home, whenever situations made him upset, he would either walk away or emotionally blow up if he held in the feelings long enough. This would usually result in hurt feelings from other family members and make the relationship with his wife even worse. Jerry commented that he frequently became irritable, tense, and anxious with headaches and occasional had difficulty sleeping. He mentioned that he rarely expressed what he felt and that he came from a family where feelings seldom were expressed. Jerry was told he needed to admit he had difficulty communicating emotions and learn appropriate ways let them out. As Jerry learned to say how he felt inside the irritability, anxious feelings and anger outbursts became less.

The key to learning new ways to express how we feel with what is happening around us. This can ultimately reduce the repression of feelings; reduce emotional outbursts, and feeling of being overwhelmed or out of control. I have listed three simple questions to ask yourself (or someone else to ask you) when you or someone notices something is wrong:

1. What feeling(s) can you identify inside yourself?
2. Why do you feel that way inside?
3. How can you better release those feelings?

When you use these questions it is best to talk out or write out your answers in a journal. The more you “let go” of your feelings in a constructive way, the better you will feel inside and the less likely you will react with inappropriate words or behaviors. Expressing feelings can be the most challenging for people who currently live or grew up in homes where emotions were discouraged or rarely expressed. If you find that changing how you or someone living with you has extreme difficulty expressing themselves, you may want to seek the assistance of a professional counselor to help find the reason for your difficulty. Do not let how you have lived life for years stop you from changing how you chose to live for years to come. Making a conscious effort to constructively and reasonably release the feelings inside is good medicine for the body, mind and soul.

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